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Jerningham

The ancient English wake



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FREDERIC THOMAS BLANCHARD
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THE ANCIENT
ENGLISH WAKE.

A P O E M.

BY MR. JERNINGHAM.

The pomp of elder days,
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictured stores.

Dr. T. WARTON.

L O N D O N :

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE Wake is of very great antiquity in this country. It was held on the day of the Dedication, that is, on the day of the saint to whom the village church was dedicated. Booths were erected in the church-yard and on the adjacent plain, and after divine service the rest of the time was devoted to the occupations of the fair, to merriment and festivity.

See Bourne's Antiquities of the Common People,
with Observations by Mr. Brand.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The merchants, who frequented the fairs in numerous caravans or companies, employed every art to draw the people together. They were therefore accompanied by jugglers, minstrels, and buffoons.

Dr. Warton's History of English Poetry, vol. ii. p. 367.

THE ANCIENT
ENGLISH WAKE.

HARK! how the merry, merry bells resound
To fummon to the Wake the hamlets round:
The villagers in all their best array
Go forth to celebrate the festive day.

Now from the moat-encircled castle came
An aged Chief, who grac'd the roll of Fame:
Who knows not * CHESTER's Earl, to worth ally'd?
The boast of chivalry, and valour's pride;

* A celebrated character in the reign of Henry the Third.

From courts and busy camps at length retir'd,
 To deeds of Fame no longer he aspir'd:
 Pleas'd, far sequester'd from the voice of praise,
 To give to peace his last remaining days,
 And while life's hour-glass near its period stands,
 To watch and pray beside the closing sands.
 But, 'mid the stillness of retirement's shade,
 Domestic sorrow on his bosom prey'd:
 A daughter, fram'd his favor to engage,
 Pride of his house, and soother of his age,
 Her native mansion had abruptly fled—
 The veil of darkness o'er the rest was spread.
 Oft of his child some welcome news to gain
 The tortur'd father sought, but sought in vain.
 He strives (this day) his sorrows to beguile,
 And hide his anguish with a sickly smile.

The hoary pastor near the village-fane
 Receiv'd the honour'd chief and all his train:

This holy, meek, disinterested man
 Had form'd his useful life on duty's plan :
 Unpractis'd in those arts that teach to rise,
 The vacant mitre ne'er allur'd his eyes.
 Regardless still of dissipation's call,
 He seldom tarried at the festive hall;
 Where all around the storied texture hung,
 Where psaltries sounded, and where minstrels sung ;
 But to the humble cot's neglected door
 The sacred man the balm of comfort bore :
 Still would he listen to the injur'd swain,
 For he who listens mitigates the pain :
 There was he seen reclining o'er the bed,
 Where the pale maiden bow'd her anguish'd head ;
 Where, reft of hope, the yielding victim lay,
 And like a wreath of snow dissolv'd away :
 With feeling soul the pastor oft enquir'd
 Where the meek train of silent grief retir'd,
 Shame that declines her sorrows to impart,
 The drooping spirit, and the broken heart.

He ne'er the friar's gaping wallet fed,
 But to the widow sent his loaf of bread :
 His fee to ROME reluctantly he paid,
 And call'd the Pardoner's a pilf'ring trade.
 The sacred Pfalter well he knew to gloss,
 And on its page illuminate the Crofs :
 The written Missal on the altar seen,
 Inclos'd in velvet of the richest green,
 Display'd initials by his fancy plann'd,
 Whose brilliant colours own'd his skilful hand.
 This gaily-letter'd book his art devis'd,
 The temple's only ornament compriz'd :
 The hallow'd service of this modest fane
 (Far from the splendor of a choral train)
 Could boast no labour'd chant, no solemn rites,
 No clouds of incense, and no pomp of lights,
 But at the plain and lowly altar stands
 The village-priest with pure uplifted hands,
 Invoking from above Heav'n's guardian care,
 In all the meek simplicity of pray'r.

Fam'd CHESTER, now returning from the fane,
 Surveys the tents gay-spreading o'er the plain ;
 Beneath whose roof the merchant-band display'd
 The cheerful scenery of active trade :
 While some intent on wealth, with sober view,
 The graver purport of the fair pursue ;
 Some of a free and roving mind partake
 The lighter callings of the busy Wake ;
 These urge the prescient fear, deep-vers'd in fate,
 Some passage of their story to relate :
 There the fond maid, solicitous to know
 Some future instance of her joy or woe,
 Attends, half-unbelieving, half sincere,
 To the vague dictates of the artful fear.
 Some by the travel'd pilgrim take their stand,
 To hear the wonders of a foreign strand ;
 While others, smitten with the love of song,
 Around the minstrel's harp attentive throng.
 Of war and daring chiefs the master sung,
 While from the chords terrific sounds he flung :

At length, descending from his lofty mood,
 The feeling bard a milder theme pursued,
 And gently wak'd those soft, complaining tones,
 So dear to melody which Scotland owns*.

Now, when the thronging audience all withdrew,
 A beauteous maiden still remain'd in view :
 She seem'd as one of the dejected kind,
 Whose face betrays the secret of the mind ;
 She look'd as parting day still ting'd with light,
 Or summer's eve when fading into night :
 She spoke — ‘ Sweet are the songs from Scotland's coast,
 ‘ They, they admire them best who feel them most :
 ‘ Abrupt, pathetic airs, devoid of art,
 ‘ That breathe upon the soul and melt the heart :

* Though the Scottish music, as we now have it, is attributed to James the First of Scotland, yet, as most of the harpers were supposed to have come from the North, it is very probable that there was something alluring and characteristic in the northern music previous to that period, and which partook of the style that reigns in the compositions of James the First, and which Tassoni calls *Musica lamentevole e mesta differente da tutte l'altre*.

‘ Still,

‘ Still, when the bard some mournful tale records,
 ‘ With plaintive harmony they clothe his words ;
 ‘ Ah! then they witness to the ear of grief,
 ‘ That food to sorrow is the best relief.
 ‘ Bend, gen’rous minstrel, to a mourner’s pray’r,
 ‘ Soothe with thy art the ills I’m doom’d to bear ;
 ‘ Still let some Highland airs thy skill employ,
 ‘ And steep my soul in melancholy joy.’

Attentive to the tuneful maid’s request,
 With magic touch the weeping harp he press’d,
 And waken’d into life that pow’rful strain,
 Whose sound persuasive charms almost to pain,
 That thrilling harmony to nature true,
 Whose arrows only wound the sacred few.

See now the throng in clust’ring numbers go
 To where the troop display’d the gaudy show *:

* Dr. Warton observes in his History of English Poetry, that the subject of this sort of spectacle was (till the reign of Henry the Seventh) confined to moral allegory, or to religion blended with buffoonery.

They first presented to th' expecting view,
 Amid encircling clouds of richest hue,
 Religion, on a throne exalted high,
 While flow'rs fell sprinkling from the mimic sky:
 Now stately ent'ring on the splendid scene,
 Array'd in white, three female forms were seen:
 These female figures to th' admiring crowd
 The names of Faith, of Hope, of Love avow'd:
 Three rivals; they appear before the throne
 To plead—and make their various merit known.

Faith, while a fable band o'erspread her eyes,
 In accents to this purport claim'd the prize;
 ' Foe to the prying search of shallow wit,
 ' Thy sacred Lore, unquestion'd, I admit:
 ' Before the dazzling splendor of the Law
 ' I close my view, and bend with trembling awe.'

Hope, with an air to confidence ally'd,
 Advanc'd.—Her symbol leaning at her side:

' The

‘ The sea of life do wrecking winds deform ?
 ‘ Borne on a plank, I smile amidst the storm :
 ‘ Still thro’ the dark’ning show’rs that intervene,
 ‘ With piercing view I mark the promis’d scene,
 ‘ Where, list’ning to the ocean’s distant roar,
 ‘ Delight sits harbour’d near the fragrant shore.’

Next Charity, with looks that dwelt on high,
 Her soul, ecstatic, beaming from her eye,
 Began——‘ No fond expectancies I frame,
 ‘ I boast no merit, no reward I claim ;
 ‘ While Heav’n’s creative power around me flows,
 ‘ The flame of love within my bosom glows ;
 ‘ Rais’d from the nature of a senseless clod,
 ‘ I burn with gratitude, and thank my God !
 ‘ I feel, I feel affection’s piercing dart——’
 She paus’d, and laid her hand upon her heart.

A dove-like form now sailing from the skies,
 Bore in her beak the flow’r-inwoven prize,

Religion reach'd it from the hov'ring dove,
And twin'd the wreath around the brow of Love.

Now to the tents the villagers repair,
The folace of the temp'rate feast to share ;
A gay pavilion, that adorn'd the plain,
Recciv'd time-honor'd CHESTER and his train:
'Twas then a maid whose cheek wore beauty's hue,
(Clad as a pilgrim) rush'd upon their view ;
And said, while at the warrior's feet she fell,
' This lowly attitude becomes me well ;
' Nor will I ever raise my blushing face,
' Till my lov'd father shall pronounce my grace:'

' Loft AGATHA !' th'aftonished CHESTER cries,
Loft AGATHA ! each glad'ning gueft replies.
' Tell, tell me, fugitive,' the father said,
' Before my blessing on thy foul I shed,
' Dost thou return with all thy bloom of name,
' And all the wonted fragrance of thy fame?

' If

‘ If foil’d by vice, in some unhappy hour
 ‘ Thy character has lost its boasted flow’r,
 ‘ Away, away—far from my sight retire,
 ‘ Nor dare, rash girl! to meet thy wrathful fire.’

With injur’d look, and blush-embellish’d cheek,
 The beauteous AGATHA began to speak :

‘ Proud of my ancestry, our honor’d name
 ‘ Shall ne’er thro’ me receive the blast of shame;
 ‘ Pure as the lily drooping with the dew
 ‘ (Heav’n is my judge) I now approach thy view.’

‘ Then with a father’s wonted glow I burn,
 ‘ My fond affections all to thee return;
 ‘ Thy look, thy words, thy tears each doubt efface,’
 He said—and lock’d her in his close embrace.
 At length he urged his daughter to recite
 The dark mysterious purport of her flight.

In act to speak advanc'd the beauteous fair,
And drew attention still as midnight air :

She sigh'd—the roses on her cheek grew pale,
While expectation panted for the tale.

‘ Recall,’ she said, ‘ that brilliant hour recall,
‘ When first RODOLPHUS grac'd the festive hall,
‘ Adorn'd with valor's wreath, in early fame,
‘ In flow'r of youth, in beauty's pride he came ;
‘ The blush of diffidence was on his brow,
‘ When in soft voice he spoke the ardent vow :
‘ Oh kind, oh generous fire ! thy friendly voice
‘ Approv'd the youth, and sanctified my choice :
‘ To his affection as I nearer drew,
‘ Encreasing merit open'd on my view :
‘ When he discours'd (till then to me unknown)
‘ I breath'd the sigh that sorrow does not own :
‘ Regardless of the throng when he was by,
‘ Still linger'd on his form my love-sick eye,
‘ Still did each moment some new charm disclose,
‘ As brings each gale new fragrance from the rose.

‘ Oh

‘ Oh tender fire ! thou nam’st the nuptial hour,
 ‘ And grac’d thy daughter with a regal dow’r :
 ‘ Ah me ! what boots it that I now display,
 ‘ The fatal cloud that brooded o’er that day ?
 ‘ That day—when hope had chas’d each ling’ring fear,
 ‘ When all my fond expectancies drew near,
 ‘ When love and fortune smil’d—joy turn’d aside,
 ‘ And left me, plung’d in woe, misfortune’s bride :
 ‘ To the swift progress of disease a prey,
 ‘ On death’s terrific couch RODOLPHUS lay ;
 ‘ As sorrow wounded o’er his form I bent,
 ‘ His closing voice these accents feebly sent—
 “ The pow’r above, whose will we must obey,
 “ Who tears me now from thee and joy away,
 “ Late saw me at the conscious altar bow,
 “ And heard these lips pronounce the hallow’d vow,
 “ *Beneath the banner of the Cross to stand,*
 “ *And scourge th’ usurpers of the Holy Land.*
 “ This unaccomplish’d vow to thee I leave,
 “ With steadfast ear my parting words receive ;

“ In the small compafs of an urn enshrin’d
 “ To fome bold warrior be my heart confign’d,
 “ To live with him when his intrepid hand
 “ Shall fcourge th’ ufurpers of the Holy Land.”
 He ceas’d—his fading eyes now roll’d in vain,
 Now clos’d—and never gaz’d on me again *.

‘ No bold advent’rous war-bred youth I fought,
 ‘ For love infpired me with a bolder thought :
 ‘ I dropt the robe that deck’d the peaceful maid,
 ‘ And, in the warrior’s garb of ftel array’d,
 ‘ Amidft the embattled ranks unknown I flood
 ‘ Beneath the banner of the holy rood.
 ‘ As in their urn RODOLPHUS’ afhes fleep’t,
 ‘ I bore them to the plain where RACHEL wept..

* It was not unufual during the long period of the Crufades for the knights to make this request upon their death-beds. Among other instances, fee particularly one mentioned by Froiffart in his firft volume, chapter 21, where the king of Scotland entreats Douglas to embalm his heart immediately after his deceafe, in order to carry it with him to the holy war.

‘ Peace

‘ Peace to the souls of Archers that were hurl’d
 ‘ In that dread moment to another world !
 ‘ Fierce from the hands of hostile Pagans flung,
 ‘ Dark o’er the field a cloud of jav’lins hung.
 ‘ Still to this mind returns (dismiss’d in vain)
 ‘ The thund’ring tumult of the horrid plain.

‘ At length our daring men to valor true
 ‘ The fiery-tressed Saracens o’erthrew :
 ‘ Still dost thou ask what charm, what sacred pow’r,
 ‘ Upheld my frame in danger’s rudest hour ?
 ‘ Behold, behold the wonder-~~wonder~~^{no less} charm *,
 ‘ That calm’d my fear in danger’s rude alarm :
 ‘ This little tomb that clasps his better part,
 ‘ Where sleep the ashes of his spotless heart,
 ‘ This relic, as it touch’d my conscious breast,
 ‘ My fainting soul with energy imprest.
 ‘ Enough—soon as the flag of truce unfurl’d
 ‘ Its softer color to the Pagan world,

* Taking the urn from her garment.

‘ To England then I urg’d my lonesome way,
 ‘ Cloath’d in this pilgrim garb of amice grey:
 ‘ Still as the tenor of my way I kept,
 ‘ O’er thee, oh father! fond remembrance wept:
 ‘ Oft did I say, while tears roll’d down my face
 ‘ (And as I spoke I mov’d with quicker pace)
 ‘ By Time’s devastating hand despoil’d of friends,
 ‘ Unspous’d, undaughter’d, my lov’d parent bends,
 ‘ Like defolation, all unfenc’d he shews
 ‘ Exposed and naked to affailing woes.
 ‘ I go, I go his forrows to assuage,
 ‘ To smoothe with filial hand the couch of age:
 ‘ Ply duty’s task, whose labors never tire,
 ‘ Invent young sports to cheer his evening fire;
 ‘ The joy I cannot feel to him impart,
 ‘ And brighten with his smiles my drooping heart.’

‘ Forbear, forbear,’ th’ enraptur’d father cries,
 (While tears of gladness glitter in his eyes)
 ‘ Oh insupportable! oh joyful hour!
 ‘ That bursts upon me in a flood of pow’r.’

He ceas'd—and to the moat-encircled dome,
 In triumph led the beauteous wand'rer home ;
 Where at the castle-gate expecting staid,
 A num'rous train to greet the welcome maid.

Mean-while the jocund villagers convene,
 Where the wreath'd may-pole crowns the festive green,
 The comely maids the gifted riband wear,
 Gay-streaming from the flow'r-encircled hair.
 See with the am'rous youths they now advance,
 Demand the music, and provoke the dance ;
 Link'd hand in hand they form the mirthful round,
 Obedient to the shrill pipe's nimble sound.
 Thus on the flowing stream of time, the day
 With prosp'rous sails glides rapidly away,
 Till, as the faint beams glimmer from the west,
 The curfew tolls the hamlet train to rest.

T H E E N D.

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